

BOER WAR ADDRESS 2009

Thank you for attending the BOER WAR COMMEMORATIVE DAY. This is the 7th occasion that the Day has been held. Next Sunday I shall be in Launceston to do likewise and it will be the third occasion that the ceremony will be held in the northern city. It has now become an annual event and I am pleased in the way it has been accepted and indeed, expected.

The question must be asked: Why do we honour the Day? It has been charged by critics that The Anglo-Boer War was an imperial war and that we (Tasmanians and Australians) should not have been involved; therefore we should forget it. In a way I think it can be compared to most wars that we have been involved in, even the First World War and perhaps our present involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention Vietnam and Korea. There is contention and a variety of opinions whether we should have been or should be in those wars. It is my personal opinion that the political question, while relevant to any commitment, is not the point when it comes to honouring our soldiers. The point is, that they served and were prepared to serve. They risked their lives. True, particularly for The Anglo-Boer War and for many the First World War until they experienced the horrors of it, our young men left our shores in the spirit of adventure. There were other motives, however and we, one hundred and more years on, may view their motives in our armchairs and judge. If we lived at the time of their lives, would we view the situation any different from how they did? In our conceit, we would perhaps like to say we would, but would we? The young men who left Tasmanian shores also left believing they were serving a Cause. The Empire called and Tasmania was very much a part of the British Empire in 1899, a time before federation. They left to represent Tasmania so that our fighting spirit and our dedication would be noticed by others and recognised by those they left behind. They served because they believed in a Cause for which they were preparing to give their life. In that, they were brave and because of their preparedness to serve, we honour them – and rightly so.

The gigantic First World War, of course, overshadowed The Anglo-Boer War. At the time of their departure, during the course of the war and their arrival home, it was a huge event and it grabbed the attention of the community. By reading the newspapers and periodicals of the day, one will realise this. After troops returned to Hobart or Launceston, the enthusiasm was fever pitch. When the First Contingent arrived home and were marched to the Domain to be addressed by the Premier and accompanied by two Tasmanian nurses, Sisters Hutchinson and Wallace, the crowd could not contain themselves. They thronged forward embracing and kissing the men. A riot nearly broke out when the excited gathering spilled over into the areas reserved for the VIPs with the Governor, the Mayor and even the troops were pushed and shoved.

Many memorials to our service personnel were erected throughout the State, not only in Hobart and Launceston, but in locations, such as Bellerive, Sorell, Ross, Beaconsfield, St Helens, Penguin, Ulverstone, New Norfolk, Waratah, Deloraine, besides many plaques and other memorials in halls and churches. such as the one on the wall in the old Oatlands Council Chambers. Then came the First World War and The Anglo-Boer War became a '*forgotten war*'. It has been long over due to recognise the service of our sons and daughters, our nurses who went out of

dedication and at their own expense to South Africa. Thousands of Tasmanians would have relatives who fought in that far away land.

As stated, this is the seventh time it has been held in Hobart. It has been the aim to keep it simple, in that the main emphasis is on '*honouring our fellow Tasmanians*' that served now one hundred and five more years ago. The Day is a '*Peoples' Day*' on an occasion when we enjoy the same status and no individual takes priority. All participating today, do so voluntarily, believing in the Day. There is no budget, even one could say no committee, just near to the event the need to organise it. Sponsorship and grants are not sought after, as one aims to keep the event independent, free from the necessity to conform to any requirement such as advertising or adhering to a stipulation, which may be politically motivated.

Yes, we are here today to honour those Tasmanians, but in doing so, we are mindful of all Australians who served, 16,000 and of the 600 men who died because of their service in South Africa, not to mention those who returned wounded, either physically or psychologically or both. We are also mindful of the service of the Canadians, the New Zealanders, the Indians and of course the British, in all 450,000 thousand men, the biggest war Great Britain was involved in since the Napoleon Wars until of course the Great War of 1914. Nor do we forget the hardy enemy the Boer who fought for the retention of his way of life and their families who suffered cruelly and the growing awareness of the Black South African who was used by both sides, not only as scouts, but also in support and in some cases as troops, especially by the British.

War is a terrible thing. Many innocent people become victims of the war not of their own choosing, such as civilians, families and even the soldiers themselves. Certainly there was adventure found by our troops, all mounted infantry; in essence though much of the war was a great tragedy. Even so, if we do not honour our men and nurses who served so unselfishly and forget them, then we are an ungrateful and self-centred people, smug in our own comfortability. I do not believe that the vast majority of Tasmanians/Australians are like that.

I would just like to finally mention that to some degree the federal government of the day did forget the veterans. For it was not until the 1950s that repatriation benefits were extended to the South African veterans and that was only after lobbying by the various Veteran Associations in Australia. By that time most of the soldiers were in their late 70s or early 80s as the average age of the Tasmanians who went away was in their early twenties.

Again, thank you for coming and thank you for listening.

END OF ADDRESS.

Acknowledgements:

Hobart City Council; The Clarence City Band; the Military Collectors of Tasmania; 22nd Lighthorse; Mathew Driessen – piper; Tony Scott MC; Chad Sutton and everyone here today. Thank you all.